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MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

DEPARTMENT OF DECORATIVE ARTS

Lawrence Room

1920

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EUROPEAN DECORATIVE ARTS

Lawrence Room

Department of European Decorative
Art Gallery Guide no. 6

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WESTERN ART

Lawrence Room.

English or Flemish Wall-Panelling, Sixteenth to the Seventeenth Century. Gift of Mrs. T. Bigelow Lawrence to the Boston Athenaeum.

The carved oak panelling known as the Lawrence Room was bought in England. When the first building of this Museum was opened on Copley Square in 1876, this woodwork was deposited there with other collections belonging to the Athenaeum. It is English or Flemish work of the sixteenth to the seventeenth century, comprising upper and lower panels, some with carving or marquetry, mouldings, a cornice with rose, crown and portcullis, corbels with crouching figures, pilasters, standing figures and a door. Six bas-relief panels in the Flemish style on the left wall at either side of the portraits represent the story of the Prodigal Son. On the window side, in similar panels, are three single figures in nearly full relief, representing Architecture, the Madonna, and Justice. A number of other panels having figures or designs in marquetry are particularly good and typically English.

Nine panels with portraits in oil belong in the room, only six of which are in place. The three not shown represent Henry VIII., Wolsey, and Edward VI., and occupied spaces under the window. These very interesting pictures may possibly be original, but are

more likely to be old copies. At the left over the mantel are the portraits of Elizabeth of York, wife of Henry VII., holding a white rose, and Elizabeth Woodville, wife of Edward IV. The portrait over the door at the right represents Henry VI.; those above the entrance door, Raleigh, Elizabeth, and Drake (?). Of the portrait of Elizabeth Woodville there are three replicas; one in Windsor Castle, one in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, and one in Queen's College, Cambridge. The date given on the portrait is 1463, a year before Elizabeth's marriage to Edward IV., when she still wore the widow's veil for her first husband, Sir John Gray.

Henry VI. wears the ermine-lined mantle of royalty and a gold collar composed of alternating Tudor roses and S's with a jewelled cross pendant. His coat-of-arms, consisting of the English lions and French fleur-de-lis quartered on a shield, shows the claim of the English kings from about 1408 to 1603 to the throne of France.

It is sometimes claimed that the portrait called Elizabeth of York is in reality a portrait of Barbara Yelverton, painted in 1501 at the age of nineteen years. Four replicas, all called Elizabeth, are reported in England, in addition to a full-length figure in a window in St. Margaret's, Westminster, which bears her name, although a direct copy from the

portrait called Barbara Yelverton.

Other objects in the room are of various origin:

The carved and panelled oak cupboard at the right is English of the first half of the seventeenth century and comes from Shropshire. Its original use was to hold dishes and other household objects. An American cupboard of somewhat similar type is shown in the room across the corridor.

Above the cupboard is a half suit of German armor of the sixteenth or seventeenth century. In the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries German armorers were noted for their craftsmanship. The beautifully wrought and engraved suits which they produced were in great demand in Europe, and German princes often sent them as gifts to foreign rulers.

In the corner at the right is a seventeenth century oak chair with carved back and wooden seat, typical of the substantial furniture in use in England during the reign of James I. (1603-1649); on either side the door are two other similar armchairs, and under the window a chest of the same period.

At the left of the door is a late example of the so-called gate-legged or hundred-legged table. The early specimens are of oak, as mahogany did not come into wide use until the eighteenth century.

The small crucifix of amber with carved ivory

panels, upon the table, is German.

A child's high chair, two arm chairs and a very elaborately carved side chair represent various types of walnut and cane furniture which was fashionable during the later Jacobean Period (1603-25). In the same group, two hand-wrought iron candle-holders are interesting for their unusual design and because the candelabra can be raised or lowered at will.

The chest at the left of the window is Danish, and was used to contain clothing and linen.

At the right of the window, the pine table with turned legs is American, about 1675. The mahogany box with brass mounts, dated 1724, which stands upon it, belonged to John Coburn, a Boston silversmith of the eighteenth century.

Two side chairs with wooden seats and cane backs are probably English.

A walnut arm-chair with a seat upholstered in petit point embroidery is English.